

2006 NOAA Fisheries Employee of the Year Nomination Narrative

Nominee's Name: Last, First, Middle:

Nomination Category:

McClure, Michelle

Program Employees – Management/Scientific/Technical

Address at Least One of the Following Factors in the Justification Below.

Contributions to NOAA and NOAA Fisheries programs that resulted in:

I write this narrative to nominate Michelle McClure as a NOAA Fisheries Employee of the Year in the Management/Scientific/Technical ZP-4 category. Michelle has worked at the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) since 1998, and her primary responsibilities during FY06 have been to conduct risk analyses for Pacific salmonids in the Columbia River Basin, to lead the Center's Research Planning Team, and to help develop a framework for ecosystem research in Puget Sound. Michelle's contributions under this general risk analysis theme have been diverse, and the results she has helped to produce have been scientifically substantive and of great import to key management questions. During 2006 at the NWFSC, Michelle's work has fallen into 3 broad categories--she has (1) co-chaired the Interior Columbia Technical Recovery Team charged with developing recovery plans for listed Evolutionarily Significant Units (ESUs) of Pacific salmon in the Columbia River Basin, (2) chaired the Research Planning Team for the NWFSC, in which she has been leading development of an overall strategic research plan for the entire Center, and (3) co-led completion of the Sound Science document, a collaborative science product describing the technical state of biological conservation and ecosystem management for Puget Sound. Below, I will briefly outline how her work in each of these main arenas has made significant contributions to programs within NOAA Fisheries and to the quality of conservation planning for species under the Endangered Species Act.

Michelle's contributions to programs within NOAA Fisheries have been through impressive improvements in the quality of scientific results and in fostering stronger links to state and tribal co-managers and local and regional groups working on recovery planning. Her work on life-cycle modeling for salmon ESUs in the Columbia River Basin has produced an improved risk evaluation method that provides reproducibility and transparency of technical analyses. Reproducible and transparent scientific analyses are critical for underpinning important and contentious decisions outlined in Biological Opinions (BiOps) and broader recovery plans, and such transparency is disappointingly rare. Michelle's analyses provide a systematic approach to risk evaluations that is broadly used today. Michelle also has taken the time to write up her scientific results so that they are rigorously reviewed and clearly documented. In FY06, she co-authored 1 paper in a peer-reviewed journal (Zabel et al. 2006) and wrote a detailed report updating the TRT's viability analyses for salmon in the Columbia River Basin. Michelle also co-led a specific risk evaluation for the latest Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) BiOp remand that involved estimating the gaps between current status and viability criteria for salmon in the entire Columbia River Basin. She co-authored several detailed reports documenting this work for use by the Regional Office in their deliberations around the BiOp. Such papers and reports greatly enhance the visibility and credibility of scientific analyses conducted by NOAA Fisheries in support of risk evaluations for Pacific salmon.

Michelle's work as co-Chair of the Technical Recovery Team (TRT) also has helped greatly in strengthening ties to constituents of NOAA Fisheries, since TRT members themselves represent broad stakeholder groups (i.e., Federal, tribal, state and local agency and academic biologists). In addition, the TRT spends significant amounts of time communicating their scientific results to policy and decision-makers in the regions where recovery planning is underway. Michelle is a master at explaining complex scientific analyses to lay persons, and her personable style encourages people to talk with her openly about interpretation of the TRT results. Her role as a translator of scientific information for use in recovery planning decisions is vitally important, and her communication skills are among the best I have observed. The results of the time she invests with policy and decision makers have been clear--the policy staff from NOAA's Regional office and others in the Columbia have a much more sophisticated understanding of the scientific nuances of the Columbia River analyses than they would have with simply trying to read and fathom large technical reports produced by Center scientists.

The second major arena in which Michelle has contributed to NOAA Fisheries is through her role as the chair of the Science Center's Research Planning Team (RPT). Michelle spearheaded a diverse group of 13 scientists at the Center who were tasked with drafting an overall strategic plan to guide the Center's research priorities in all areas, including social science and economics as well as biology and oceanography. Under Michelle's leadership, the RPT has in 2006 convened and facilitated input from Center scientists on their research priorities through a number of workgroup discussions, brainstorming sessions with Center staff, and a comprehensive staff survey with an excellent response rate. Most recently, the RPT spent 2 days at a writing retreat and drafted a strategic research plan for the Center, which is close to being ready for review by a broader group.

2006 NOAA Fisheries Employee of the Year Nomination

Narrative (continued)

Nominee's Name: Last, First, Middle:

Nomination Category:

McClure, Michelle

Program Employees – Management/Scientific/Technical

A final project that Michelle co-led over the past year and a half is Sound Science (Sound Science 2007), which is a scientific document intended to support large-scale ecosystem management in the Puget Sound region. The document represents a common scientific statement of what is known about the Puget Sound ecosystem, key science gaps, and likely future conditions. Producing the document involved writing large portions, and soliciting information from tens of authors and over 100 reviewers from scientists in academic, local, tribal and federal institutions. This unique document already is proving to be instrumental in supporting next steps in planning for Puget Sound ecosystem management under the Governor's Puget Sound Partnership, and it has the potential for becoming a model for how to communicate what we know about ecosystems in other regions.

In summary, Michelle McClure has been in FY 2006, and continues to be, an incredibly productive scientist. Her work on behalf of NOAA Fisheries has improved our agency's ability to standardize and improve our scientific analyses underpinning risk evaluations, to defend our work because of its publication in peer-reviewed journals, and to communicate our results so that they influence conservation planning decisions. She is active in publishing her research and in presenting her work at scientific conferences and in public fora, and she collaborates with several academic colleagues in research, as well as supervising the work of a number of contract workers, student interns, and post-doctoral associates. In addition, Michelle's eagerness to provide relevant and high quality work is reflected in her willingness to tackle challenging project management tasks and more recently, her position as the strategic research lead for the overall Center. She has dove into her new role as lead of the Center's strategic research planning with characteristic vigor, humor and vision. Michelle has contributed in important ways to the quality of scientific work and the morale of the Center. I strongly recommend that she be chosen as a NOAA Fisheries' Employee of the Year in recognition of her efforts.

Zabel, R. W., M. D. Scheuerell, M. M. McClure, J. G. Williams. 2006. [The interplay between climate variability and density dependence in the population viability of Chinook salmon](#). Conservation Biology, 20(1):190-200.

Sound Science: Synthesizing ecological and socioeconomic information about the Puget Sound ecosystem. 2007. Mary Ruckelshaus and Michelle McClure, coordinators; prepared in collaboration with the Sound Science collaborative team. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NMFS), Northwest Fisheries Science Center. Seattle, Washington. 93 p.